

*Young people and health:
health behaviour in
school-aged children (1997)*

Summary of key findings

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Health Education Authority
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30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

www.hea.org.uk

Printed in Great Britain
5m 3/99

ISBN 0 7521 1309 7

A full report of this summary, published by the Health Education Authority, is available to order. Contact Marston Book Services for more details, quoting ISBN 0 7521 1308 9.

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Summary

General health and self-image

- 93% of the sample considered themselves to be quite or very healthy;
- boys were more likely than girls to think they were very healthy – 27% as against 16%;
- 9 out of 10 young people felt generally happy about their life at present and 1 in 3 felt very happy;
- half of boys in all five years were happy with their weight but whilst a half of girls in Year 7 were happy with their weight this fell to a third of Year 11 girls.

The school environment

- 3 out of 4 young people said they liked school;
- older pupils were more likely to be negative about school than younger ones;
- 22% of young people had been bullied this term;
- 50% of young people expected to go on to study A levels at school or college.

Outside school

- only 1% of young people did not watch television at all on an average day;
- nearly three-quarters of young people watched television for more than two hours a day;
- a fifth (22%) of young people said they played games or sports that made them out of breath or sweaty in their free time every day and 70% did so at least twice a week;
- boys were more physically active than girls; a third of boys did sport every day compared to a sixth of girls;
- just under 2 in 5 young people had received an injury that required medical treatment in the preceding 12 months;

Young people and health

- boys were more injury-prone than girls; two-fifths of boys in Year 11 had been injured in the past year;
- a quarter of injuries occurred at home and another quarter occurred at a non-school sporting facility.

Smoking

- 45% of young people had smoked a whole cigarette;
- 22% of girls were currently smoking compared to 16% of boys, and girls were more likely to smoke every day;
- 3 in 5 of all those smoking said they would like to give up;
- two-thirds of current smokers had tried to give up;
- attitudes towards smoking varied considerably by whether the young person smoked.

Drinking

- 77% of Year 7 and 96% of Year 11 pupils had tasted an alcoholic drink;
- 1 in 5 young people did not drink alcohol at all and three-fifths only drank a little;
- 15% drank a moderate amount and 7% drank more than a moderate amount;
- heaviness of drinking increased with age; only 5% of those in Year 7 said they drank more than a little alcohol compared with 46% of Year 11.

Drugs

- 30% of those in Years 10 and 11 had tried cannabis; 17% had tried it 3 or more times;
- the next highest levels of experimentation were for glues or solvents to inhale and gas/aerosols/butane/lighter fuel to inhale;
- for all drugs except cannabis, less than 30% of those in Years 10 and 11 who had ever used the drug had used it in the past 4 weeks;
- at least 6 in 10 young people considered each type of drug harmful if taken on a regular basis;

- if a young person had taken the drug in question, they were less likely to consider it harmful;
- 6 in 10 of those in Year 10 thought most young people would try drugs at some time.

Sexual health

- nearly all of those in Years 10 and 11 had had classes on ‘how our bodies develop’, sexual relationships, contraception and having a baby;
- 21% thought there were no topics on which they had not had enough information;
- two-thirds of young people said they got most of their information on sexual matters from school and a similar proportion said they got it from friends;
- 84% of young people said that using a condom would protect them against sexually transmitted diseases and 69% thought that not having sex would have the same effect;
- 9 out of 10 young people had heard of the condom, the contraceptive pill and the female condom;
- girls were generally better informed about contraception than boys.

Health behaviour

- there was a clear relationship between smoking, drinking alcohol and experimentation with drugs;
- young people who smoked, drank alcohol or had tried drugs were less likely to assess themselves as ‘very healthy’;
- health risk behaviour was associated with negative feelings towards school;
- there was no evidence from the survey that health risk behaviour was associated with low self-esteem.

1 *Introduction*

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Health Behaviour of School-aged Children Survey (HBSC) is a World Health Organization Cross-national Survey initiated in 1982. The study has three main aims: to gain new insights into young people's health attitudes so that appropriate health promotion and education can be undertaken; to increase understanding of how young people perceive health itself; and to develop national information on the health and lifestyles of each country's young people. This will help programme developers to design strategies and interventions that lead to improvement in health.

The HBSC survey is administered to school-aged young people at regular intervals, at least every four years, in a growing number of countries. England, as represented by the Health Education Authority (HEA), was accepted as an associate member of the project in 1995 and commissioned British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) International to carry out the work. It was decided to run the second survey in November/December 1997, based on the internationally agreed protocol.

This report summarises the findings of this second survey. The full HBSC report includes more details and covers more topics than are contained in this summary.

1.2 THE SURVEY

Topics dealt with in the survey included: demographic information, behavioural questions relating to major health issues (including smoking, drinking, physical activity and nutrition), psycho-social aspects of health, the school as a work environment, injury and social inequality. For 15-year-olds the survey in England also included questions on the use of illegal substances and on sexual health. The target populations are those within 6 months of the age means of 11 years 6 months, 12 years 6 months, 13 years 6 months, 14 years 6 months and 15 years 6 months.

Young people and health

The sample was selected as representative of the general school population in England. Schools were randomly selected. The final sample size was 10,407.

In total 100 schools were approached and if they refused a matched substitute was then approached: 70 schools agreed to take part. A random sample of 42 pupils from each of Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 (or the relevant years where schools did not cover all five) was selected. The pupils and their parents were then notified about the survey, at which time parents had the opportunity to refuse permission for their son or daughter to take part.

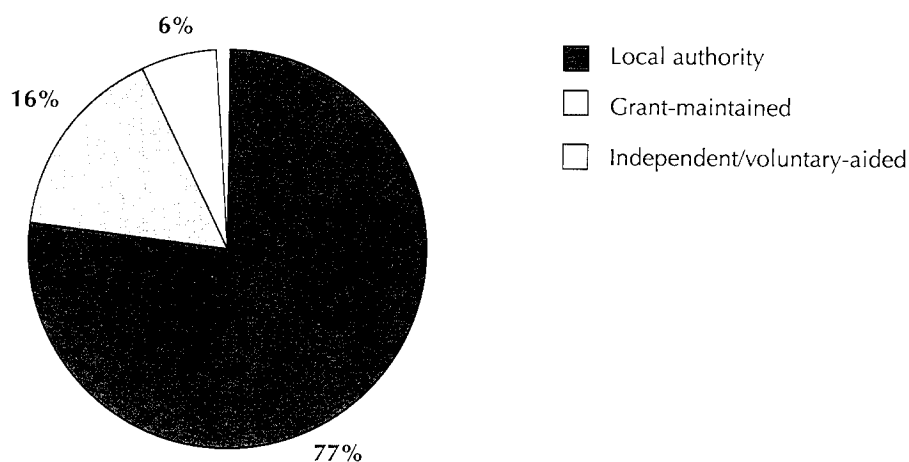
BMRB interviewers supervised the young people while they filled in their questionnaires. The completed questionnaires were sent back to the office for data entry; 83% of the selected pupils completed a questionnaire with sufficient data for analysis.

2 *The young people and their families*

The sample was evenly split between girls and boys (49% boys and 50% girls) and between each of the five school years (7–11) with approximately a fifth of the sample in each year.

Nearly four-fifths of the sample (77%) attended schools maintained by the local education authority. A further 16% of the sample went to grant-maintained schools and 6% went to independent or voluntary-aided schools.

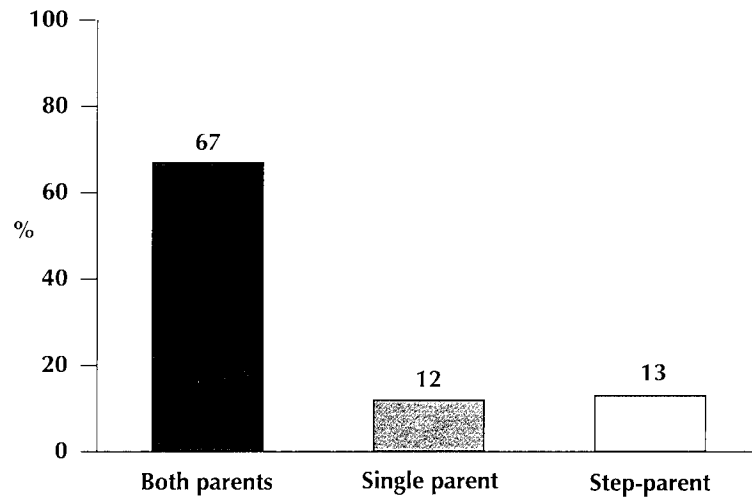
Figure 1 Type of school



Base: all respondents (10,407)

Two-thirds (67%) of the young people lived with both their natural parents and a further 12% lived with one natural parent – in nearly nine cases out of ten this was the mother. Thirteen per cent of young people had a step-parent – nearly always a stepfather.

Figure 2 Household type



Base: all respondents (10,407)

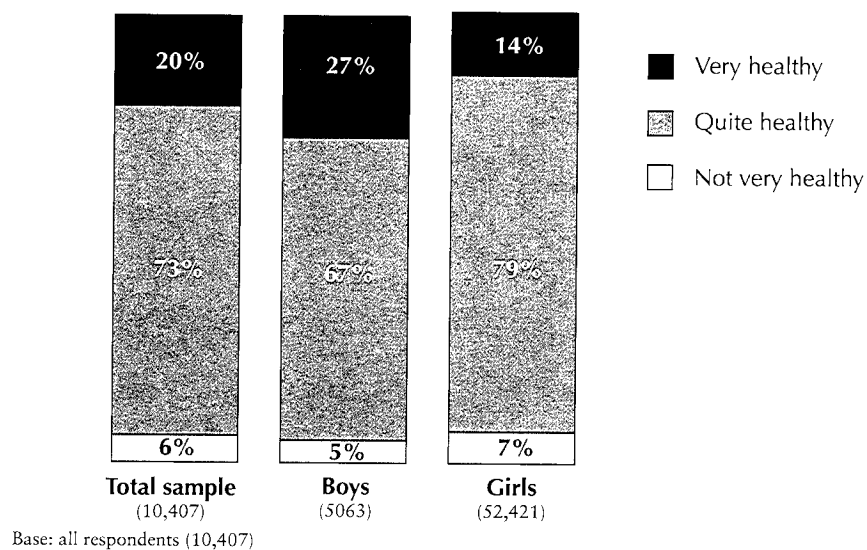
A third (33%) of respondents were classified as belonging to the ABC1 social grade and almost half (47%) to C2DE social grade. One-fifth of the sample did not provide enough information for even this broad classification.

3 General health and self-image

3.1 SELF-ASSESSMENT OF HEALTH

Although the majority of young people considered themselves healthy, only one in five (21%) saw themselves as very healthy. Boys were much more likely to give themselves this rating than were girls, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Self-assessment of health



Six per cent of young people said they were not very healthy. Young people who smoked, drank alcohol or had tried drugs were more likely than others to say this as were those who disliked school and those who did not do much exercise. Young people living with

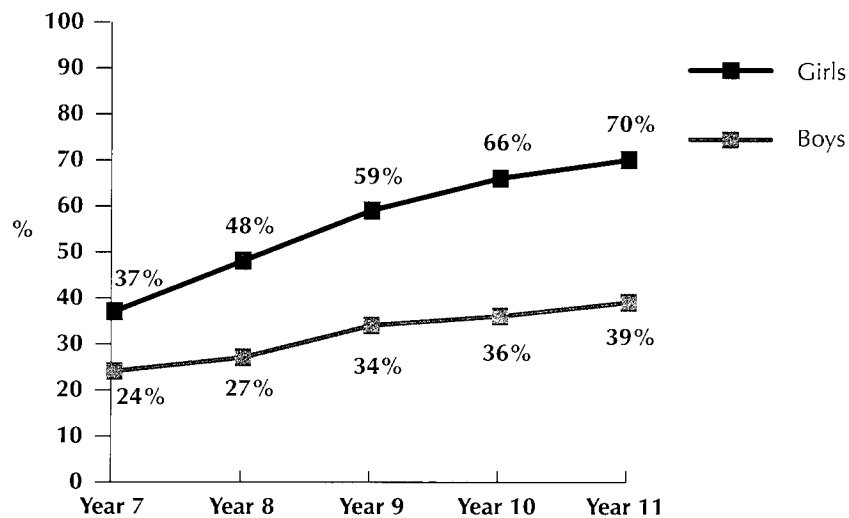
both natural parents were slightly more likely to have a positive view of their own health than those who lived with one natural parent only or whose family included a step-parent.

3.2 WELL-BEING AND SELF-IMAGE

Nine out of ten young people (91%) said they felt generally happy about their lives at present and more than a third (35%) felt very happy. Over half (56%) always or often felt confident in themselves; nearly two-thirds (63%) rarely or never felt helpless and nearly half said they never felt lonely. On all these measures, boys rated themselves more positively than girls, particularly with regard to feeling confident.

When asked if there was any part of their body they would like to change, two out of five respondents (44%) said that there was. This proportion was significantly higher for girls than boys in each age group, and also increased with age for both sexes.

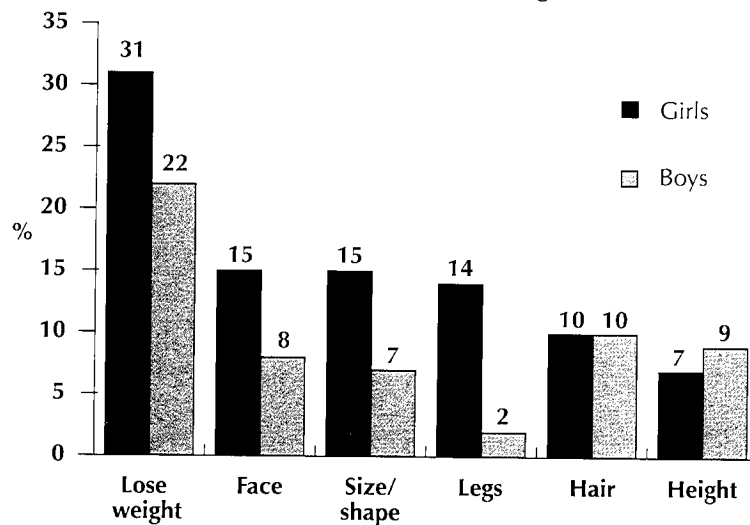
Figure 4 Desire to change physical appearance



Base: all respondents (10,407)

Figure 5 shows the changes most commonly desired by those young people in the sample who would like to change something.

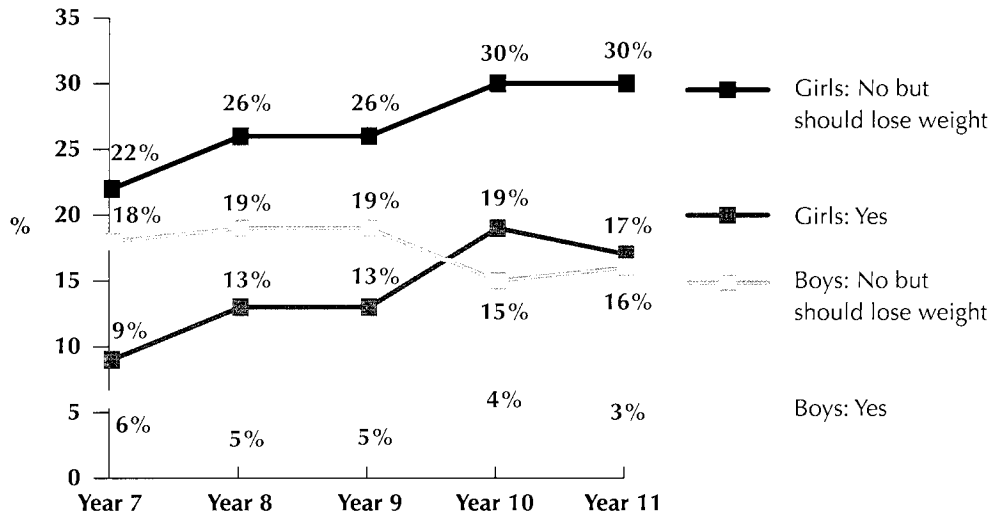
Figure 5 Aspect of appearance they would like to change



Base: all who would like to change something (3140)

A related issue is that of dieting. Two-thirds (67%) of young people were happy with their current weight at the time of the interview; one-third of the remaining pupils were on a diet at the time. Girls were more likely than boys to worry about their weight and to be on a diet; this was particularly the case for older pupils – half (47%) of all girls in Year 11 were not happy with their weight, and about one in five (17%) were on a diet (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Whether on a diet to lose weight



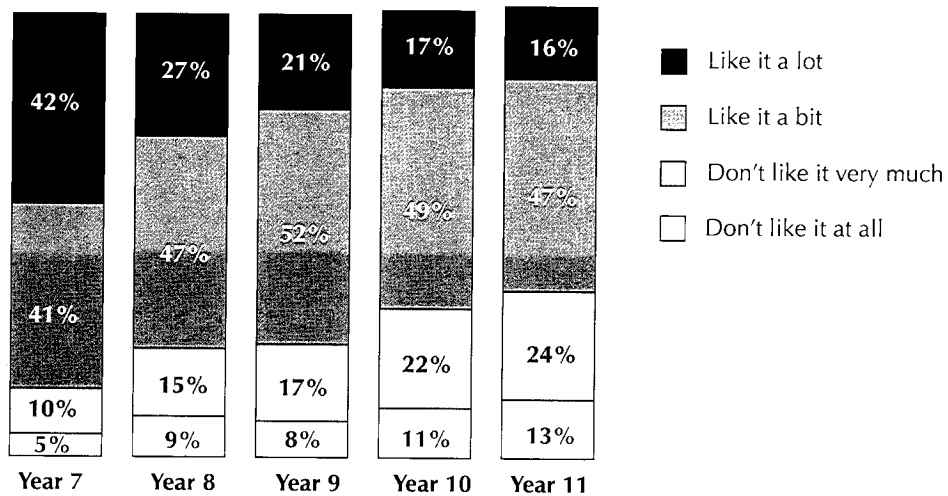
Base: all respondents (10,407)

4 The school environment

4.1 ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of young people said they liked school, with a quarter (25%) saying they liked it a lot. There was a marked decline in positive attitudes as pupils got older and although boys and girls had similar attitudes overall this difference varied a great deal with age. Girls in Year 7 were much more likely than boys in the same year to say they liked school a lot but by Year 11 there was little difference between the sexes.

Figure 7 Attitude towards school

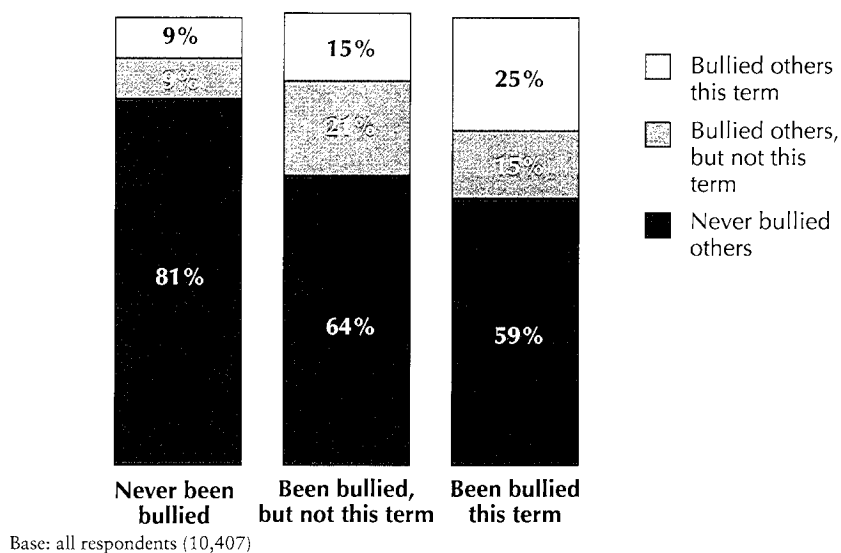


Base: all respondents (10,407)

4.2 BULLYING

Half of all young people had been bullied at some time during their time at school and just over one in five had been bullied during the current school term. However, fewer than one in three (28%) said they had ever bullied anyone else at school. Boys were more likely to have bullied others than were girls (30% compared to 25%).

Figure 8 Experience of bullying and being bullied

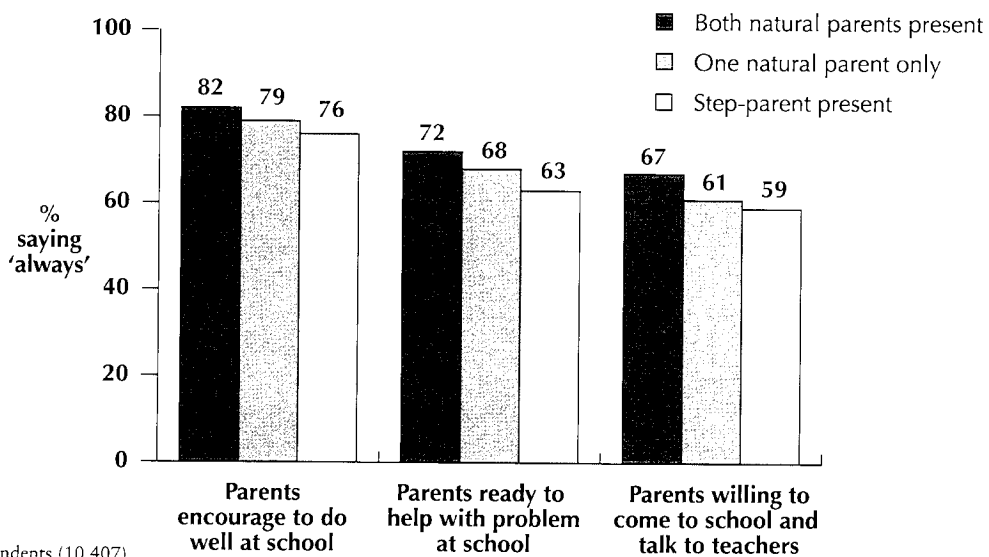


There was a strong correlation between those who had bullied others and those who had themselves been bullied. The relationship was particularly strong amongst those who had been bullied within the last term, one in four (25%) of whom had bullied someone else in the same period.

4.3 PRESSURES OF SCHOOL

The young people were asked to indicate how frequently they received help and encouragement in their school life from their parents; overall the results were encouragingly high. The type of household from which the young people came made some difference to their answers to these questions, as can be seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9 Parents' involvement with school



Half of all young people expected to go on to study A levels at school or college when they reached age 16, with a further 15% expecting to be at school or college studying some other type of course.

Social grade of the young person's household was an important factor affecting response to this question – nearly two-thirds (64%) of those from ABC1 households expected to be studying A levels at school or college, compared with under half (45%) from C2DE households.

5 Outside school

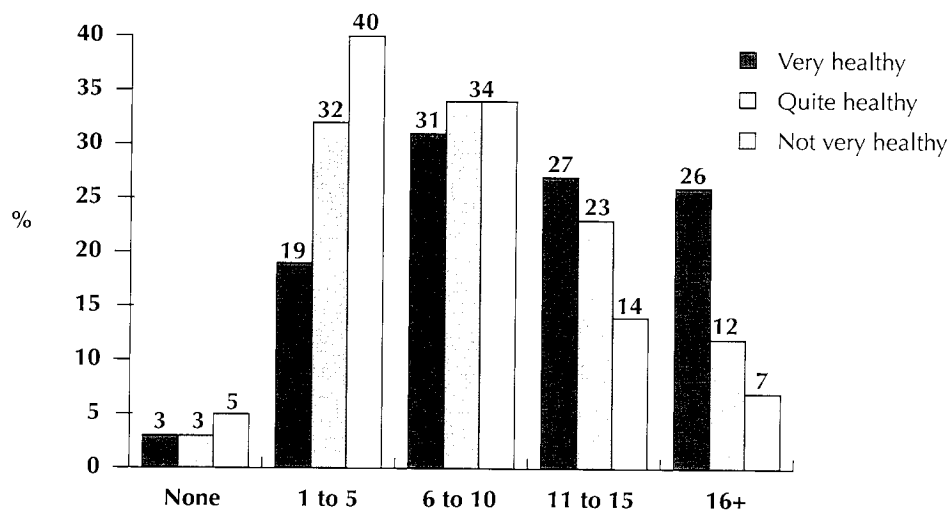
5.1 TELEVISION CONSUMPTION

Just 1% of the entire sample said they did not watch television at all on an average day, and only one in twenty (5%) watched for less than half an hour a day. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of young people watched television for more than two hours a day. Whilst three-quarters (73%) of those who said they were quite or not very healthy watched television for two or more hours a day, only two-thirds (65%) of those who said they were very healthy watched this much.

5.2 EXERCISE IN FREE TIME

In order to get an indication of how much physical activity young people did in total, a calculation was made of the number of half-hour (or longer) sessions of activity young people did in a week. This was calculated by summing the number of days per week that young people did at least half an hour walking, cycling, other non-school physical activities or PE at school. It was then possible to assess whether the amount of physical activity was related to the young people's self-assessment of their health.

Figure 10 Number of half-hour activity sessions per week, by self-reported health



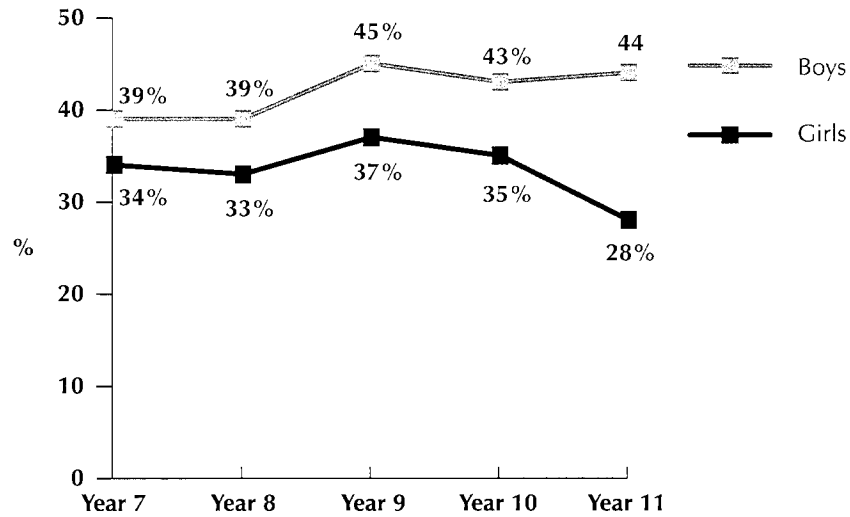
Base: all respondents (10,407)

Those people who said they were very healthy were much more likely than those who said they were quite healthy or not very healthy to do 11 or more activity sessions of at least half an hour per week (49% of the very healthy did 11 or more compared with 32% of the less healthy group). Correspondingly those who said they were quite healthy or not very healthy were more likely than those who were very healthy to do only five activity sessions or fewer (35% compared with 21%).

5.3 INJURIES

Just under two in five young people (38%) had received an injury requiring treatment from a doctor or nurse in the past 12 months. One in five (20%) had just one injury, one in ten (9%) received two injuries and a further one in ten (9%) received three or more injuries. As shown in Figure 11, boys were more injury-prone than girls and tended to receive more injuries as they became older. More than two in five Year 11 boys (44%) had been injured in the past year, and almost a quarter (23%) had received two or more injuries.

Figure 11 Injuries requiring treatment by a doctor or a nurse in the past 12 months



Base: all respondents (10,407)

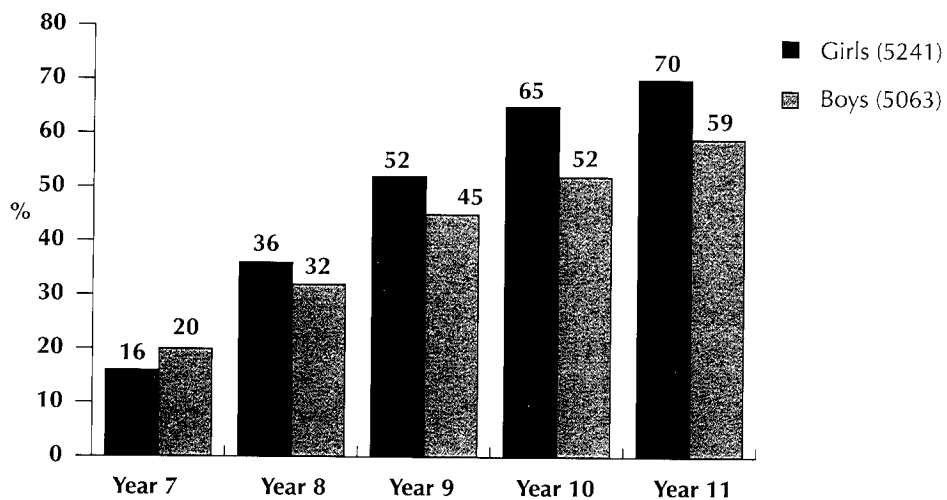
Those respondents who had been injured in the previous 12 months were asked where their most serious injury had occurred. The most common location was at home (24%), followed by a non-school sporting facility (23%).

6 Smoking

6.1 PREVALENCE OF SMOKING

Almost half (45%) of the sample had smoked at least one cigarette. Girls were more likely than boys to have tried smoking, and, for both genders, levels of experimentation increased sharply with age (Figure 12).

Figure 12 Experience of smoking



Base: all respondents (10,407)

More girls than boys in the survey were current smokers and girls were more likely to smoke every day. The incidence and frequency of smoking increased with age – 4% of young people in Year 7 were current smokers compared with 36% of those in Year 11.

6.2 GIVING UP

Three in five current smokers (61%) said they would like to give up. The proportion wanting to give up was higher for female smokers than for male smokers and also increased with age from 51% in Year 7 to 67% in Year 11 (69% in Year 11 girls).

Smokers were then asked whether they had tried to give up. Two-thirds said they had; again, girls were more likely to have tried to give up than were boys and again levels rose with age from 52% of smokers in Year 7 to 67% of smokers in Year 11.

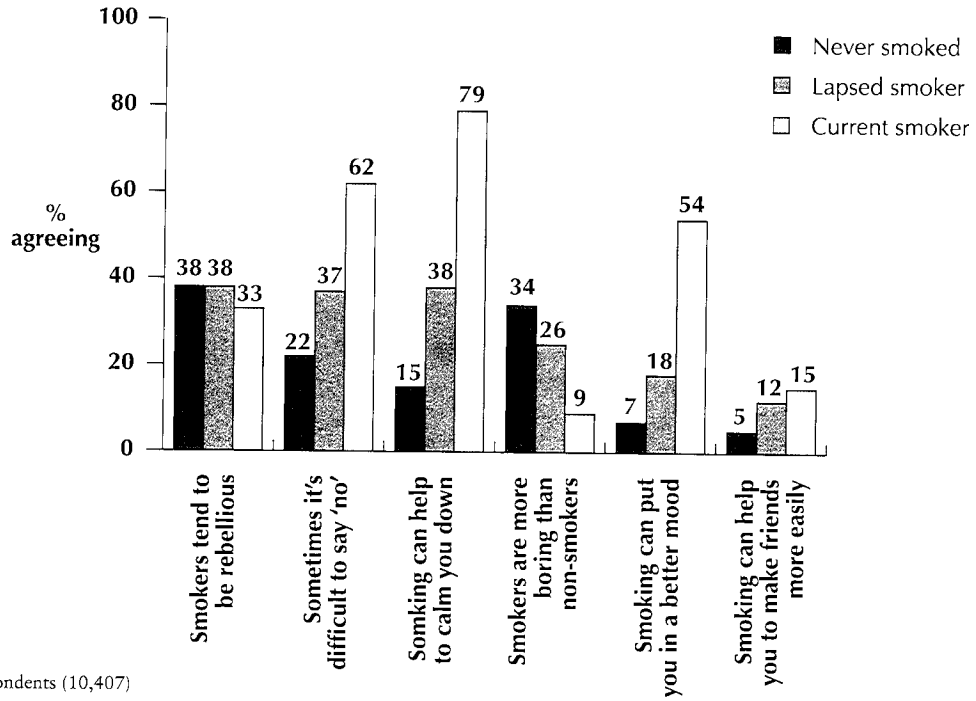
Further analysis showed that 82% of those who wanted to give up had already tried to do so. However, 46% of those who did not currently want to give up smoking had still tried to do so at some point in the past.

6.3 BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

All young people were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about smoking. Figure 13 shows some of the results by smoking behaviour.

The highest level of agreement was with the statement 'smokers tend to be more rebellious than people who don't smoke' with relatively similar levels of agreement between smokers and non-smokers. Most statements, however, led to different responses depending on whether the young person currently smoked or not. This was particularly true for the positive statements about the direct effects of smoking such as 'smoking can help to calm you down' and 'smoking can put you in a better mood'.

Figure 13 Beliefs about smoking



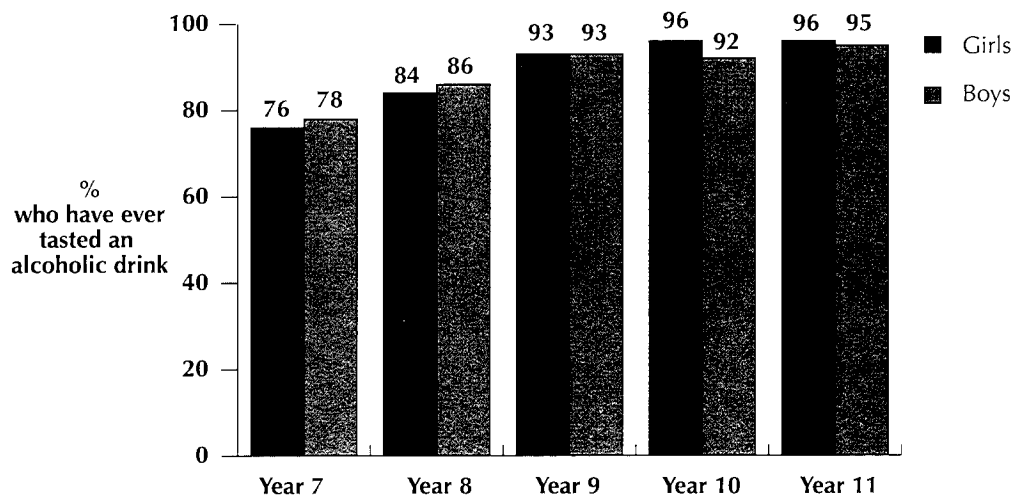
Base: all respondents (10,407)

7 Drinking

7.1 PREVALENCE OF DRINKING

The majority of young people said they had tasted an alcoholic drink, rising from 77% in Year 7 to 96% in Year 11. When asked about their current drinking habits, one in five said they did not currently drink alcohol at all, 15% of young people said they drank a moderate amount and 7% said they drank more than a moderate amount. Heaviness of drinking increased with age – only 5% of young people in Year 7 said they drank more than a little alcohol compared to nearly half of those in Year 11.

Figure 14 Experience of tasting an alcoholic drink

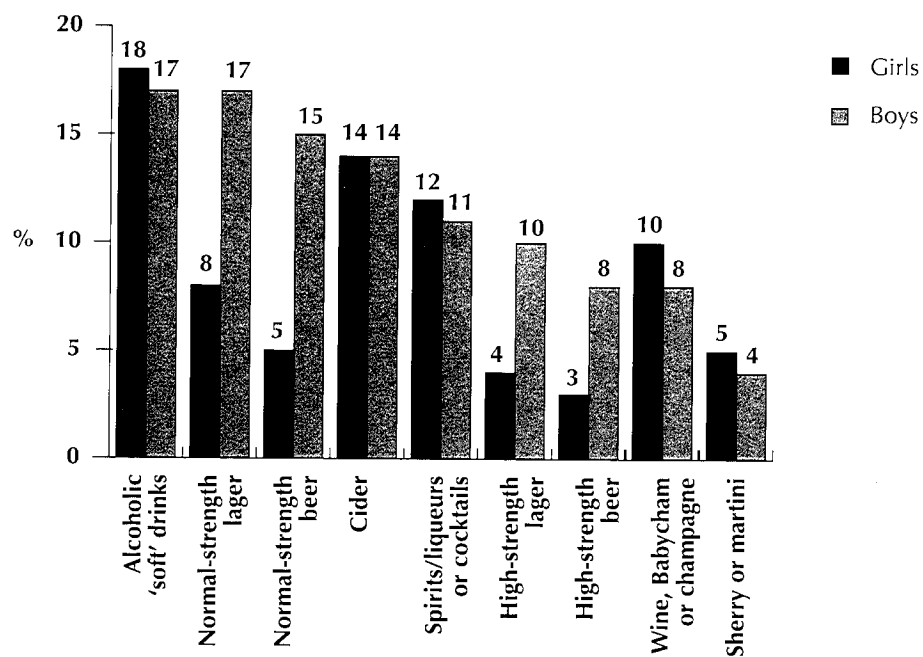


Base: all respondents (10,407)

7.2 TYPES OF ALCOHOL CONSUMED

Young people who drank any alcohol were asked how frequently they drank various types of alcoholic drinks. Alcoholic ‘soft’ drinks were the most popular with school-aged young people: 18% of those drinking alcohol said they drank this type of drink at least once a week. Next in popularity was cider (14% of young people who drank alcohol drank cider at least once a week), normal-strength lager (12%) and spirits/liqueurs/cocktails (12%).

Figure 15 Alcoholic drinks consumed at least once a week



Base: all who ever drink alcohol (8286)

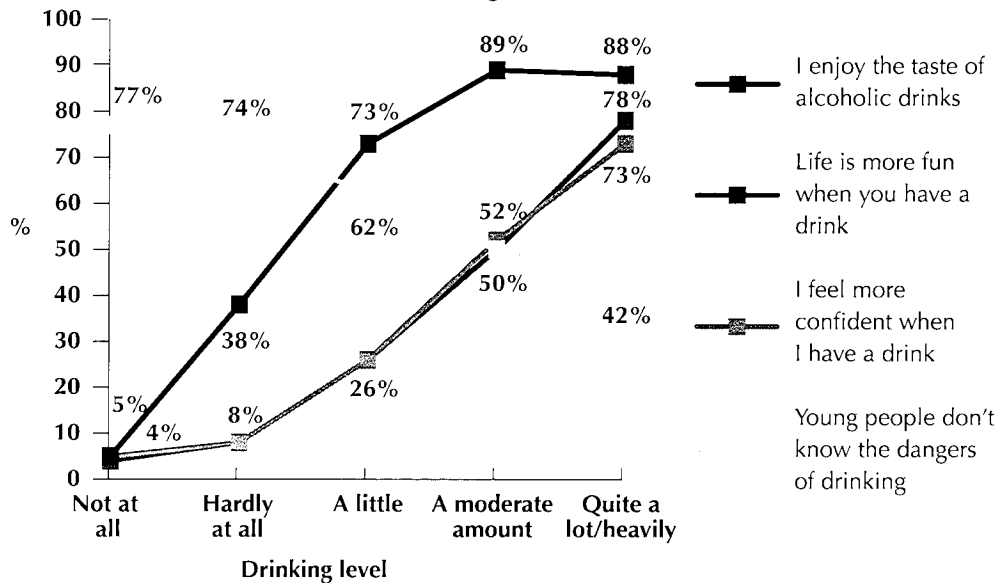
7.3 FREQUENCY OF GETTING DRUNK

Just over one in five (22%) had been really drunk once and nearly two-fifths (39%) up to three times. A further one in ten (9%) had been really drunk between four and ten times and a similar proportion of drinkers (10%) had been really drunk more than ten times. One in five young people (20%) in Year 11 who drank alcohol had been drunk more than ten times.

7.4 ATTITUDES TOWARDS ALCOHOL

All the young people were presented with a series of statements about alcohol and drinking and were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each one. Figure 16 shows some of the results by drinking habits. As might be expected the more the respondent drank, the more likely they were to give the answer more favourable to drinking alcohol.

Figure 16 Attitudes to alcohol and drinking



Base: all respondents (10,407)

8 *Drugs*

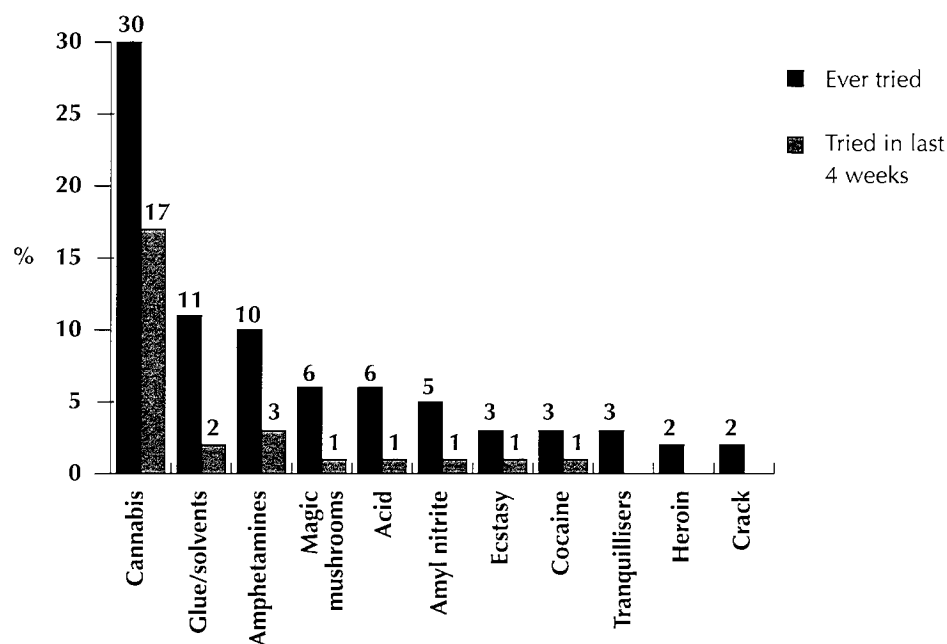
The older pupils (Years 10 and 11) were asked questions about their experiences of and attitudes towards the use of illegal drugs.

A fictitious drug, 'nadropax' was included in the answer lists for the survey in an attempt to determine whether young people were exaggerating their knowledge or usage of drugs. Of the Year 10 and 11 samples, 4% mentioned nadropax as one of the drugs they had tried. A separate 'nadropax-excluded' base was formed from the remainder of Years 10 and 11, and used to analyse some of the questions on personal drug experience.

8.1 EXPERIENCE OF EVER TRYING DRUGS

By far the most commonly tried drug was cannabis which 30% had tried and 17% had tried three or more times. The next highest levels of experimentation were for glues or solvents to inhale (11%) and gas/aerosols/butane/lighter fuel to inhale (11%). There were also higher levels of experimentation with amphetamines (10%) and magic mushrooms (6%).

Figure 17 Experience of trying drugs



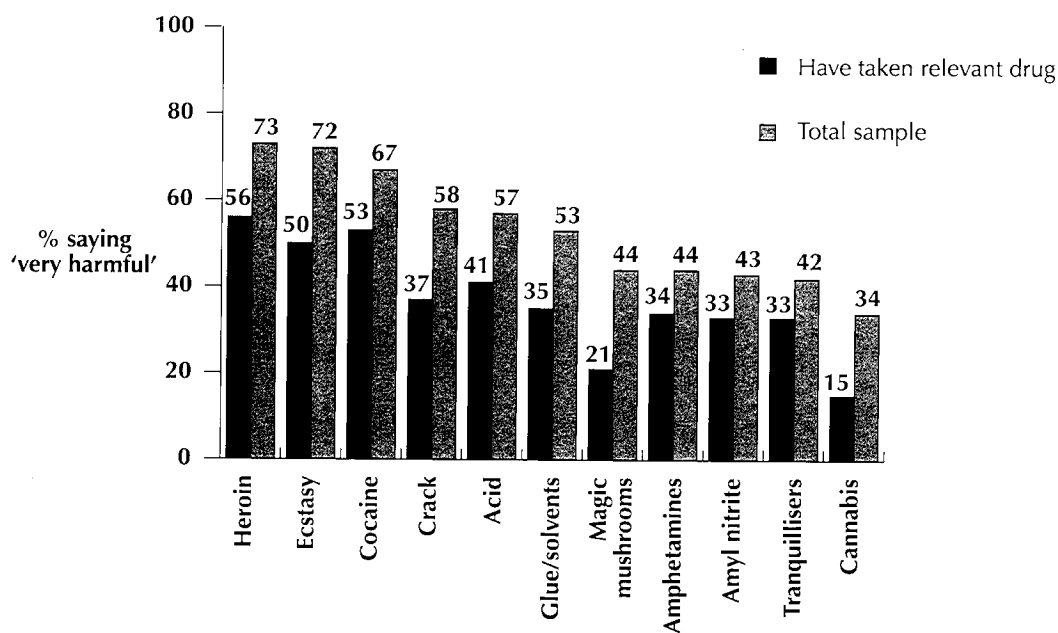
Base: Years 10 and 11 ('nadropax-excluded' sample)

For all drugs except cannabis, less than 30% of those in Years 10 and 11 who had ever used a drug had used it in the past four weeks, and the majority of those who had used it in the past month had used it only once or twice. By contrast, over half of those who had ever used cannabis had done so within the last four weeks, and nearly a quarter had done so three or more times.

8.2 BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DRUGS

Six in ten young people (61%) considered most of the drugs listed to be harmful to some extent ('fairly' or 'very' harmful) if taken on a regular basis. The exceptions were amyl nitrite (58% thought harmful), cannabis (56%), alcohol (45%) and caffeine (25%).

Figure 18 Whether consider drugs harmful if taken on a regular basis

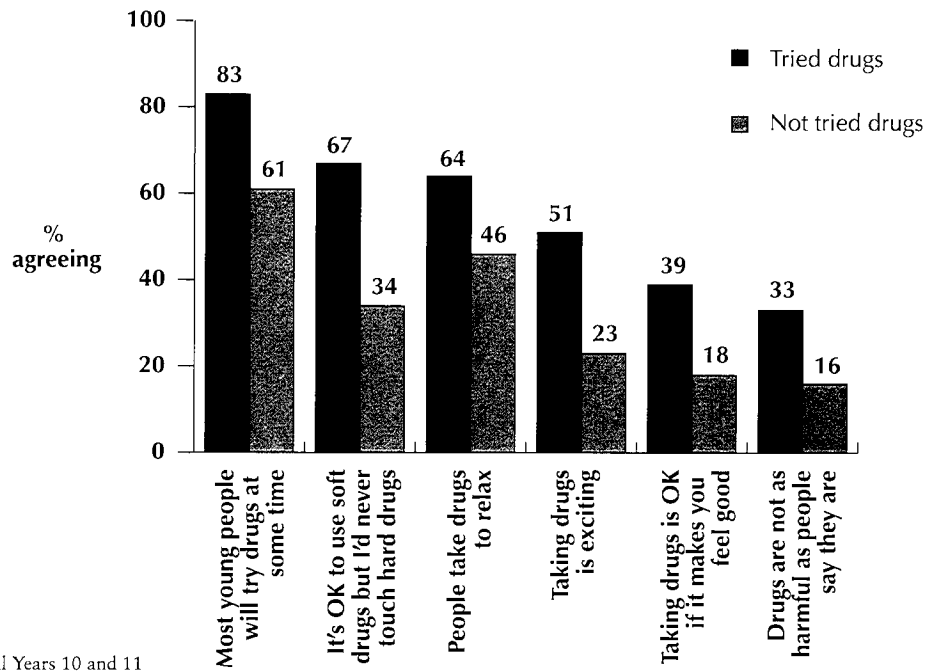


Base: all Years 10 and 11

If a young person had taken the drug in question, they were far less likely to believe that it was dangerous. Figure 18 shows the proportion of both the whole sample and those who had tried the relevant drug who considered each drug 'very harmful' if taken on a regular basis.

As with smoking and drinking, the Year 10 and 11 pupils were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about taking drugs. Figure 19 shows some of the results.

Figure 19 Attitudes to drug use



Base: all Years 10 and 11

Over six in ten of those in Years 10 and 11 thought most young people would try drugs at some time and, although this was higher for drug experimenters, half of all those who had not tried drugs still thought this was true. Drug experimenters were more likely than those who had not tried drugs to agree that 'it's OK to use soft drugs like cannabis but I would never touch hard drugs like heroin' and 'taking drugs is exciting'.

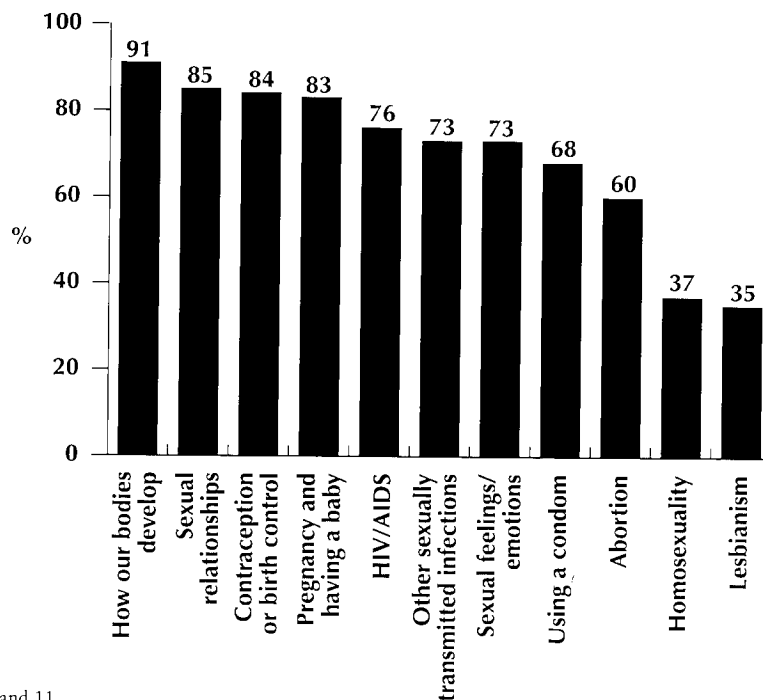
9 Sexual health

Young people in Years 10 and 11 were asked a number of questions about the sex education they had received and their knowledge of various methods of contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.

9.1 INFORMATION

Nearly all young people in Years 10 and 11 recalled lessons on 'how our bodies develop', sexual relationships, contraception and birth control and pregnancy and having a baby. By contrast, less than two in five recalled lessons on homosexuality or lesbianism.

Figure 20 Topics discussed at school



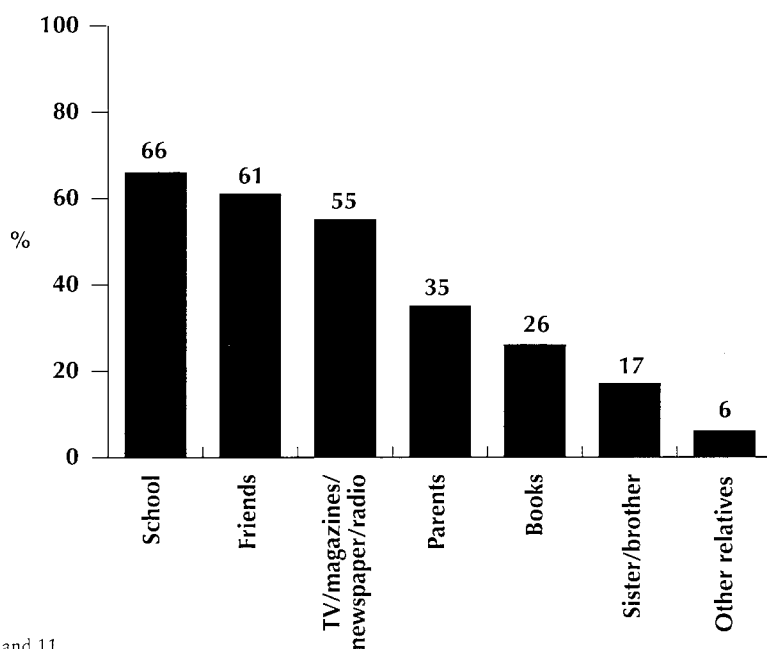
Base: all Years 10 and 11

Young people and health

A fifth of all those in Years 10 and 11 thought there were no topics on which they had not had enough information. The topics on which the most young people thought the school had not given them enough information were lesbianism (44%) and homosexuality (42%). In addition a third of those in Years 10 and 11 said they would like more information on HIV/AIDS and a similar number would like more information on abortion.

The young people were also asked where they got most of their information about sexual matters from. Two-thirds of young people in Years 10 and 11 said they got most of their information from school and a similar proportion said they got it from their friends.

Figure 21 Source of most information about sexual matters



Base: all Years 10 and 11

9.2 BELIEFS ABOUT SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

The young people were asked if they had heard of a range of sexually transmitted infections, including a dummy infection 'gonaditis'. Nearly all young people had heard about HIV and AIDS but levels of knowledge about other sexually transmitted infections were much lower.

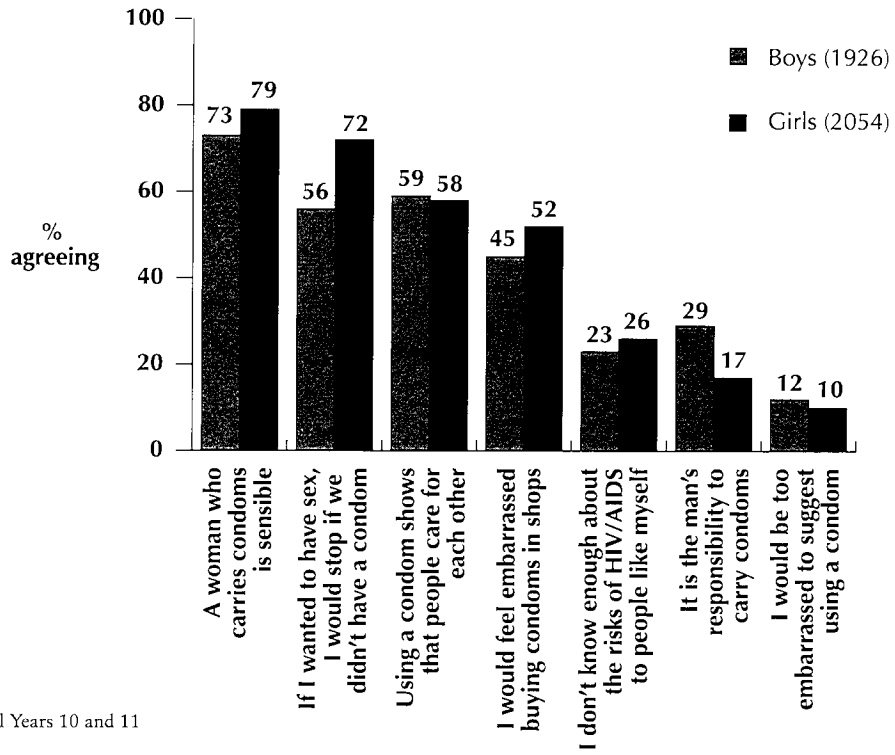
Most young people (84%) said that using a condom would protect them against sexually transmitted infections and over two-thirds thought that not having sex would have the same effect. Over a quarter of young people said that the pill acted as a protection against sexually transmitted infections and a similar proportion thought the same about having a steady partner.

9.3 CONTRACEPTION

The young people in Years 10 and 11 were also asked if they had heard of a number of methods of contraception. More than nine out of ten of the young people asked had heard of the condom, contraceptive pill and the female condom. There were varying degrees of knowledge about the other methods but generally girls were better informed than boys and, as would be expected, the oldest pupils were better informed than those one year younger.

The young people were then asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about condoms. The results are shown in Figure 22.

Figure 22 Attitudes to condoms



Base: all Years 10 and 11

10 Health risk behaviour

There is a clear relationship between smoking, drinking alcohol and experimentation with drugs – smokers were more likely than non-smokers to drink alcohol and drinkers were more likely than non-drinkers to smoke. In addition, in Years 10 and 11, 68% of those who currently smoked had tried drugs compared with only 11% of those who had never smoked.

Young people who smoked, drank alcohol or had tried drugs were less likely to assess themselves as ‘very healthy’ and more likely to suffer the symptoms of both physical and mental ill health.

Young people who smoked, drank alcohol or had experimented with drugs were more likely to feel that teachers treated them unfairly and had a poor opinion of their school performance. They tended to feel pressurised by school work and believe that too much was expected of them by both teachers and parents. Fewer expected to stay in full-time education after the age of 16.

Being bullied and bullying other people were much more common amongst those who smoked, although there was little difference according to whether the young person drank alcohol or not. Approximately half of all smokers in Year 7 had been bullied or had bullied others whereas 45% of non-smokers had been bullied and 16% of non-smokers had bullied other people.

There is no evidence from the survey that health risk behaviours are associated with low self-esteem, which was measured mainly in terms of young people’s ability to make friends and be at ease with others. However, smoking and drinking were associated with dissatisfaction with one’s own body and poor perceptions of physical fitness.

